

## When the World Recedes, Art Persists: A Presentation Art as of a Counter-Narrative to the Apocalypse in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*

عندما يتراجع العالم، يستمر الفن: عرض الفن كسرد مضاد لنهاية العالم في *Station Eleven*

لإميلي ساينت جون ماندال

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### Abstract

Recently, pandemic literature gained wide significance due to the growing interest among readers as well as writers who want to document and explore possibilities of life with the effects of pandemics. Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) is a novel that stands distinguishable among the category of pandemic literature. The novel records the end of the world prior to a pandemic flu spread and the rebirth of a new world simultaneously. The novel weaves an interdisciplinary space fusing art with fiction. The fusion of several artistic forms takes the form of a subversive narrative to the apocalyptic vision. The main premise of this essay, therefore, is to demonstrate the role of artistic forms and its transformation into a site of resistance and contesting pandemics.

**Keywords:** the apocalypse; art; music; performance; resistance.

**المخلص:** إكتسب الأدب الوبائي مؤخرًا أهمية بالغة نظرًا لاهتمام القراء الزائد والكتاب من أجل تشخيص واكتشاف احتمالات الحياة في ظل انعكاسات الأوبئة. تعتبر رواية *Station Eleven* للكاتبة الكندية المعاصرة إميلي ساينت جون ماندال مثالًا متميزًا ضمن فئة أدب الأوبئة والتي انفردت بتشخيصها الدقيق والعاكس للحياة الواقعية من جهة وسرد احتمالات النجاة في ظل انعكاسات الأوبئة على البشرية من جهة أخرى. تسرد الرواية نهاية العالم في ظل انتشار إنفلونزا وبائية، وولادة عالم جديد في نفس الوقت. تتسج الرواية مساحة متعددة التخصصات بحيث تمزج الفن والخيال. يأخذ هذا المزج عدة أشكال فنية تشكل السرد المضاد لرؤية نهاية العالم. لذلك، الهدف الرئيسي لهذا المقال هو إظهار دور عدة أشكال فنية من أجل مقاومة الأوبئة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** نهاية العالم، فن، موسيقى، تمثيل، مقاومة.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Human nature has always been in a struggle against the fatality of death, which is a reminder of man's failed efforts to regulate life possibilities. Throughout times, man experimented and searched to stop or at least limit various forms of sickness and death. The fatalness of death, however, always triumphs against these attempts. In the arena of literature, many literary works have portrayed the struggle of man and scientific research in the face of different calamities. Literature has been the historical reservoir and the eyewitness of human limited knowledge and relative mastery of greater forces including death. Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) is a novel that records the failure of medical advancement specifically and the total breakup of civilization. The massive death of ninety-nine percent of earth's population in the novel illustrates the ending of human progress. The novelist, however, transcends this ending through the fusion of different artistic forms which constitute a site of resistance. To examine the relationship between the apocalypse and art, the present paper provides a reading of the novel in the light of William Butler Yeats's conception of historical movements. In addition, the paper relies on studies carried out in the field of music, performance, art, and psychology. The first part of the article presents a reading of the novel through highlighting the narrative of the apocalypse while the second part offers a reading of the subversive narrative and the role of art in transcending the apocalyptic vision.

### 2. The Narrative of the "apocalypse" in *Station Eleven*:

In Yeats' *The Vision*, the poet anticipates two major scopes of civilization advancement that pertain to the ordinary forward advancement and its reversing cycle of withdrawal or regress. Yeats explains the reverse with illustrations of the moon's light being "subjective" because of its deem quality in contrast to the sun's light which is extremely clear and "objective". Accordingly, the moon cycle is called "antithetical" while the sun's cycle is "primary" (Yeats, 1925, pp. 13-14). These are the two cyclic motions of historical events as one era approaches the end, another one takes shape. Likewise, Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* is a novel that skillfully records a vision of two worlds; while one is on the verge of collapse, the other one is born. Similar to Yeats's notion and the apocalypse narrative, Mandel pictures the end of a historical era and the

beginning of a new world full of hope. The novelist's apocalyptic narrative parallels Yeats' landmark of modernist poetry *The Second Coming* which is a poem accredited for being a highly symbolic poem that signifies the poet's response to major historical changes taking place at the turn of the century. It was a turbulent period of history due to the effects of the Great War (1914-1918), the Russian war (1922), and the Irish war (1919-1921). During that time, Yeats' imagination was preoccupied with wars that strand from his home country Ireland to worldwide wars with long lasting-tragic effects.

In addition to the pessimistic drift and the loss of hope, the poem is also a reflection of Yeats' theory of history. Yeats's historical perception centers around the cyclic motion of history or "gyres" as stated in the first verse of the poem "turning and turning in the widening gyre" (Finneran, 1996, p. 186). Historical events are cyclical turning against themselves as one millennium nears the apex, another starts over. By the turn of the century, Yeats believed that modern civilization reached the threshold and this apocalyptic vision sustained the prophecy of the end of the world. Yeats accounts for several historical movements that include the rise and decay of many civilizations like the Greek, the Roman, and the rise of the Christian Kingdom. Simultaneously, Yeats describes the period from 1875 to 1927 as a "climax" and a period of war (Finneran, 1996, pp. 186-209). Likewise, Mandel's novel is a narrative that chronicles the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. The character Frank for instance appears with his brother Jeevan contemplating, "All evidence suggested that the center wasn't holding" (Mandel, 2014, p. 170) which is a direct reference to Yeats's *The Second Coming* where "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold" (Finneran, 1996, p. 186). In *Station Eleven*, the center of the world which is supposed to represent balance and power is fractured as life after an unprecedented pandemic is rendered near impossible.

The novelist demonstrates this scientific recession as early as the first scenes picturing the tragic death of Arthur Leander. The novel opens up in the pre-pandemic period accounting for the death of the famous rich actor Arthur whose death becomes an example of this scientific recession. His death on stage is a major event that symbolizes the utter failure of medicine to save human life while Jeevan's, as well as the cardiologist's continued attempts of CPR, could

not relief Arthur's heart to breathe again. The scene foretells the near-total breakup of civilization, science, and technology that will take place a few days after Arthur's death. Indeed, "science, as the source of explanation and legitimacy, becomes something of a secular religion. In its modernist guise, infused with a sense of almost limitless capacity to realize progress, death can be viewed as a defeat, a failure, a fault" (William Simon C. et al.1993, p. 417). Besides his unpredicted death, Arthur is a type of person who did not know how to enjoy his life or even his fame. He passed through rough times to move from a little island in Toronto - his homeland - to become a famous actor in New York. Although the narrative does not delve much into his psyche, Arthur is a man who lives unstable life in terms of personal and familial relationships. Arthur has no friend to trust or seek help during difficult moments and not even a united family as he keeps marrying and divorcing different women.

Fame and money could guarantee neither a united family nor friends to Arthur. Ironically, the audience did not show the least concern for the critical situation of Arthur; rather, they were along with journalists interested more in taking first shots of the scene or any exclusive announcements. Arthur's death and people's reaction are reminiscent of the contemporary stoic life where the human value is reduced and death is ridiculed. Indeed, "At most levels of would contemporary social life, the normalization of change extends to death and dying" (Simon et al. 1993, p. 414). Whether actors on stage or audience inside the theatre, nobody was mourning the death of the first actor. Even the theatre director was contemplating whom to call declaring Arthur's death but he found nobody except his lawyer. As such, Arthur's death becomes a symbol of a contemporary state of irony where fame and money can never guarantee happiness or peace of the mind. In parallel with the first stanza of Yeats' *The Second Coming* that reveals a chaotic scene full of blood while the world is on the verge of explosion, Mandel draws the first scenes of *Station Eleven* painted with a dreadful death atmosphere. This atmosphere will become more evident when near all of the people die in unprecedented flu that spread so rapidly. The effects of the flu pandemic are unparalleled while all types of immunity systems or defense mechanisms fail. At the beginning of the pandemic spread, the symptoms of patients were very similar to ordinary flu but with the rising number of death, quarantine measures were taken and people start to freak out and rash to

food stores to get supplies. The novel indicates that it was a flu “that exploded like a neutron bomb over the surface of the earth and the shock of the collapse that followed” (Mandel, 2014, p. 39). In a matter of days, the world’s controlling systems stopped with no internet, electricity, social media, water, or food supplies.

The breakdown of social, political, and civic order calls to mind the old-new debate of man’s behavior in the absence of civilization. The novel portrays the new world invaded by the pandemic as a dark large area where names, maps, and borders that define the former geographical boundaries did not matter anymore. In such a place, people are categorized into two opposed types. Some peaceful people are ready to help others and do not kill unless in self-defense. The second category of people act criminally and murder people for the sake of food and supplies or even for religious motifs. As such, the narrative puts into test man’s behavior between morality and immorality in the absence of civilization, rules, and law.

Searching for basic needs of survival becomes a deadly battle and many people show regress instead of progress during these times of catastrophes. The prophet and his men are a case in point of people who completely lose their sense of humanity. In the same line with Yeats’ prophecy of the coming of “a rough beast,” the prophet is the beast incarnation who justifies his criminal acts by religious references and the motif of cleansing earth from evil people. He develops his claim from the book of Revelation as he states, “For it has been revealed to me that the plague of twenty years ago was just the beginning, my angels, only an initial culling of the impure, that last year’s pestilence was but further preview and there will be more cullings, far more cullings to come” (Finneran, 1996, p. 59). The prophet who is Arthur’s son Tyler grows up into a fanatical man murdering innocent people and spreading horror. The prophet kidnaps all of Dieter, Sayid, and the twelve years old Eleanor intending to marry her among other people like Kirsten who meets him towards the end of the novel in a deadly encounter. The prophet becomes a symbol of devilish forces and darkness in opposition to the symphony that symbolizes the forces of goodness and hope. The prophet’s evil deeds affected the symphony greatly and cracked

their backbone of unity especially when the prophet's men killed the innocent Dieter.

The prophet's beliefs and actions are a reminder of the darker side that resides in the psyche of the human being. In the absence of civilization and law, these people will unleash their evil impulses and destroy the world. The actions of the prophet and his men provide evidence of the weakness of human nature and civilization at large. Accordingly, chaos and withdrawal prevail in the post-pandemic period because of people like the prophet. Good people "saw and judged themselves and their actions as good, I mean first rate, in contrast to everything lowly, low-minded, common and plebeian" but not necessarily good, they are people with power and attribute to themselves goodness ultimately (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 11). Nietzsche's understanding of good and evil stresses the relative aspect of judgments and signifies that the labels of good and evil are relatively constructed. This explains the prophet's statements and behaviors as he calls himself and his men "the light" coming to rescue the world and his actions are prophetically derived from the words of God as revealed to him. He is unable to see how harmful his deeds are and believes he is doing good to the rest of the people.

### **3. Transcending the Apocalypse through Art:**

The narrative moves forward twenty years after what the novelist calls "the end" describing the pandemic outbreak and its disastrous outcomes but was it after all the end?. The story indicates that it was the end of an era and the beginning of a new one in parallel with Yeats' understanding of history. This ending was never ultimate actually for the reason that a post-end always takes place instead. This suspended state of being is reminiscent of "The end itself, the moment of cataclysm, is only part of the point of apocalyptic writing" (Burger, 1999, p. 6). Indeed, the narrative space is divided into two parts that are juxtaposed. As one narrative accounts for the pre-pandemic world, the second narrative pictures the post-pandemic life. The transitional moment of passing from one life into another appears a joyful moment despite all death and troubles. Clark for instance is glad to witness one world ending up and another one beginning.

The post-pandemic period chronicles the story of human survival and the potential to look ahead for the future. Some catastrophes that befall humanity are trajectory and may cause the extension of human beings in a matter of days including pandemics, and their ability to stay alive is conditioned by providing basic supplies like food and water but also to produce coming generations and save humanity (Baum et al. 2019, pp. 09-11). Truly, *Station Eleven* is a story that clearly highlights survivors's ability to supply their basic needs and ensure the rebirth of the next generations which explains the large space the novelist provides for the post-pandemic narrative compared to the apocalyptic narrative space. This "Postapocalypse, then, is not a teleological endpoint but is positioned as transitional and haunted by memories of the pre-catastrophe world" (Doyle, 2015, p. 101). Indeed, through storytelling, memories, and interviews, the post-pandemic narrative jumps forward and backward in a manner to picturesque the dramatic changes between the two periods. While the first narrative depicts the near ultimate ending of human civilization, the second narrative weaves the threads of human regeneration, hope, and rebirth. The post-pandemic narrative is fueled also with memories of the old lost life. These memories become important as a reminder of what has been lost and how the new world is built upon the old one. The strong link with the old world is evident with many characters like Kirsten who keeps collecting entertainment news searching for any photos or interviews of Arthur. Likewise, Clark's museum of civilization becomes an eyewitness of materials, possessions, objects that belonged to the old world.

### **3.1 Musical Exhilaration:**

The post-pandemic narrative records mainly the travels, triumphs, and trials of the symphony whose members are musicians, actors, violinists, drivers, scouts, guitarists, among others. Even though differences and misunderstandings occur but these members share a harmonious relationship as these people appear united under the flagship of the symphony spirit while traveling. To survive, these people hunt; spread scouts, and arm themselves for defense. The symphony plays music that constitutes "the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, and especially the social world, which the bourgeois ethos tends to demand of all forms of art" (Bourdieu, 2010,p. 43). Indeed, while playing, the symphony's music becomes a site of consolation where the audience lends ears

to listen, to enjoy, and to suspend their hardships shortly. This audience regardless of their former backgrounds or social status is united.

The effects of music are magical and its healing powers on the people who survived the pandemic are transcendental as it alleviates them from their painful realm into a more joyful one. During these spectacular times, the pandemic turns to be a unifying factor rather than a dispersing one. The symphony plays Beethoven symphonies which are “passionate and defiant” (Scruton, 1979, p. 57). Some types of music like Mozart and Beethoven create sympathy in the listeners through “detaching our thoughts and emotions from the things of this world and directing them to a realm in which temporal things find their eternal counterparts” (Scruton, 1979, pp. 65-79). For that reason, music becomes a space of joy that people can feel but cannot express or put into words “Music in the listening culture is a voice that arises from silence, and which uses silence as a painter uses the canvas” (Scruton, 1979, p. 56).

### **3.2 Theatrical Exhalation:**

On the road, the symphony members entertain people while many young men and women were attracted to their performance. The symphony performs jazz, classical orchestral arrangements, pop songs, but for most Shakespeare’s plays. Performing plays made the symphony members unit during “moment of transcendent beauty and joy” as the novelist puts it (Mandel, 2014, p. 48). They were like a big family with their problems and disputes but above all friendships. Members debate what play they should perform among Shakespeare’s famous ones including *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *A Midsummer Night’s dream*. One of the possible reasons why Shakespeare’s plays appeal so much to people who survived the flu pandemic is the cross parallels between the year 1594s when Shakespeare’s London was under a serious plague that caused the closure of theatres and year 20 after the flu pandemic which caused the death of ninety-nine percent of the population. People felt akin to Shakespeare’s time and the prospect to remember their stories during the pandemic while watching Shakespeare’s plays performed. In an essay entitled *Psychopathic Characters on Stage*, the writers explain the artistic vision of drama and playacting. They point out, “All varieties of suffering are therefore the theme of drama, which promises to create out of them pleasure for the spectator...it shall cause the spectator no suffering, and that it must know how to compensate by means of the gratifications which it



makes possible for the pity which it arouses” (Freud and Bunker, 1960, p. 145). Indeed, the audience’s constant demand to watch Shakespeare’s tragic plays becomes a relief for them. In fact, Shakespeare’s tragedies like *Hamlet* and *King Lear* implies a fusion of comic aspects implied in the tragic ones. These comic aspects are closely related to “the mood and temperament of the reader” (Nason, 1906, p. 30). Undeniably, the symphony’s audience was eager to watch something from the past that could entertain and make them forget about their new terrible life after the pandemic. Watching tragedies performed, would lessen the effects of their tragic life to some extent. In his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud shares this view when he argued, “the artistic play and artistic imitation carried out by adults, which, unlike children’s, are aimed at an audience, do not spare the spectators (for instance, in tragedy) the most painful experiences and can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable” (Freud, 1961, p. 11).

Another likely reason for Shakespeare’s appeal pertains to the promise of bringing down high culture into the public sphere. The choice of Shakespeare’s plays to perform and even Beethoven symphonies is very specific and indicative as these arts belong to the category of “high art”. These artistic categories represent the high culture taste which is “the culture of ‘serious’ writers, artists, and the like” (Gans, 1999, p. 100). Even the museum of civilization in its essence represents a high-class cultural taste but in the novel, the museum becomes a home for so many people and travelers coming from different backgrounds. In the pre-pandemic world, theatre performances and museum visits were considered high culture activities and the common cannot afford to reach it or even appreciate it, during the post-pandemic period, however, all arts became accessible to everybody. Conditions during the new era erased class differences, and therefore the formerly classified high-class arts became accessible sources of entertainment and joy. This is what is called “aesthetic pluralism” (Gans, 1999, p. 94) is a symbol of the mingling of different cultural tastes in one society.

This symbolic bringing down of the high taste culture is reminiscent of the contemporary world where titles, status, boundaries constitute a very relative matter. With the pandemic spread, all people are equalized living in similar conditions and hardship and the sole thinking of man becomes survival. In other

words, the calamity of the pandemic bond many people under similar circumstances. Accordingly, economic and social barriers that are used to classify and categorize people in a certain frame are erased during artistic spectacles in particular. The art that the symphony is performing brings people united within the same range being an audience regardless of the differences.

Apart from being a source of unity and relief during grim times, sometimes, the symphony becomes a shelter for people in danger like the twelve-year-old girl Eleanore who was escaping the prophet's fanatical plans of marrying her. The symphony was like a mobile home for different members and the novelist indicates, "sometimes the symphony thought that what they were doing was noble. There were moments around campfires when someone would say something invigorating about the importance of art, and everyone would find it easier to sleep that night" (Mandel, 2014, p. 106). To succeed in performing means to engage the audience and make them feel the beautiful fusion that life stories intermingle with performances on stage. The novel entails many instances where life becomes a play acted on stage. The opening dramatic scene of Arthur Leander lying on stage with a massive heart attack amid performing is a case in point.

The scene is evidence of how close the threads are between living and acting, reality and performance, actors and spectators. While the audience watches Arthur dying on stage, confusion was created about the possibility that Arthur is still performing. In an interview with Jeevan, Arthur confesses that his life is similar to "a movie" and Jeevan responds, "Did this happen to all actors, this blurring of borders between performance and life?" (Mandel, 2014, p. 185). Before ascending to the stage in the role of the Shakespearean tragedy King Lear, Arthur in his fifties addresses his only son Tylor who lives in Jerusalem as well as promising Tanya to pay back her university loans. Like King Lear in his old age, worried about his kingdom and dynasty, Arthur considers his familial and personal relationships. Having spent his life in trials and experiences from Toronto to New York in order to secure a role and become a big actor in movies, Arthur keeps contemplating about his three failed marriages and abandoned only heir to his mother Elizabeth. Arthur's unhappy life urns to be an example of a tragedy.

### 3.3 Aesthetic Sketching:

In addition to performing, the artistic aspect of the novel becomes very apparent with many other characters including Arthur's first wife Miranda who sketches graphic series entitled *Station Eleven*. Miranda draws a fictional space station that escaped the planet earth after it has been controlled by aliens. Some rebels led by Dr. Eleven, however, managed to survive the tragedy and escape. In the series, Miranda foresees that the doom will take place in a thousand years in the future, which makes the novel futuristic. Looking to details provided in her work, the reader signs that Miranda perfectly draws life on an imagined space similar to many events that will take place in a couple of years on earth during the pandemic flu. Miranda sketches Dr. Eleven, his allies, and enemies while living in an entirely dark galaxy like the dark world of the survivalists after the pandemic flew without electricity. Sometimes Dr. Eleven bears resemblance to Arthur himself which signifies the close borders between fact and fiction.

Some details of Miranda's graphic novel explain that she has been working on it for so many years continuously. Her break-up with her lover Pablo and then her divorce from Arthur are considered events that are greatly prompted by her firm dedication to her artistic work and detachment from the real world. Attending one of the parties with her husband Arthur, Miranda clarifies that her aim is not to publish her work but rather the work itself and the joy she finds while carrying it out. Her artistic dedication brings to mind the fin de siècle aesthetic advancement of "art for art's sake" where the artist devotes himself solely to his art; "It would be in error to underplay the historical significance of aesthetics and its critical role in understanding how perceptual dispositions toward 'what is' have been shaped" (Lopes, 2015, p. 20) which explains the importance of this work of art for the artist creator.

Kelly Comfort outlines three fundamental aspects of an aesthetic work of art that find resonance with Miranda's aesthetic novel. First, the detachment of the subject matter of the work from actual daily life and instead the artist should direct his work with the aim "to conjure distant and exotic realms, to fashion fantastic and unreal spaces, and to take on forbidden and taboo themes" (Comfort, 2008, p. 02). Indeed, regarding the subject matter of her drawings, Miranda draws sketches of Dr. Eleven and his people who live on a space station;

a typical fantasy setting. This is Miranda's vision of a different life distanced from the planet earth. The second form of the aesthetic spirit pertains to the total breakup of the artist and his work from realistic conventions including "morality" and "didacticism" (Comfort, 2008, p. 02) which describes rightly the artist Miranda who worships her total freedom and abhors any type of ties including both her relationships with Pablo and Arthur. In both relationships, the two men try to impose rules and conventions upon Miranda but each time she detaches herself from them adhering her full insights to art solely.

The third category in the aesthetic creation relates to embracing the artistic spirit of aestheticism as a mode of life for the artist creator (Comfort, 2008, pp. 02-03). Considering Miranda's type of art, one sees that her vision is idealistic to some extent. She is the artist who focuses on her subjective inner state as she seeks pleasures, and follows her instincts especially when she breaks up with Pablo and cheats on him with Arthur. Although Pablo is a painter/artist, his aim behind the painting is selling not art itself and in his relationship with Miranda, he seems indifferent to her artistic efforts. Miranda's artistic spirit, however, illustrates her sole dedication to her sketches. With Arthur, Miranda seems even more distanced from him and his acquaintances who do not understand her work properly. When Tesch for instance asks her whether she is going to publish her graphic novel, she responds that she does not know and confesses, "It makes me happy. It's peaceful, spending hours working on it. It doesn't really matter to me if anyone else sees it." (Mandel, 2014, p. 86). Miranda is aware that her outspoken opinions may seem weird but she cares the least about that. At some point towards the end of the novel, Miranda starts hallucinating thinking that she is Dr. Eleven which draws the lines between art and life even closer.

Miranda's commitment and aesthetic spirit, however, cost her greatly as she seems to live inside a shell with a difficulty explaining her art to her husband and his entourage. After divorce, Miranda offers two unpublished copies of her graphic novel Dr. Eleven exclusively to Arthur but he seems never to understand her drawings or appreciate her art. Instead of reading the copies, he sent a copy to his son and another one to Kirsten. Notably, these two copies last for a period of twenty years after the pandemic when the prophet/Tyler's copy appears along with Kirsten's; a fact that solidifies the argument that art has the power to persist.

At a certain stage of her artistic vision, Miranda felt that: for years Dr. Eleven had been the hero of the narrative, but lately he'd begun to annoy her and she'd become more interested in the Undersea. These people living out their lives in underwater fallout shelters, clinging to the hope that the world they remembered could be restored. The Undersea was limbo. She spent long hours sketching lives played out in underground rooms. (Mandel, 2014, pp. 186-187)

Miranda's paralleled world of fiction is analogous to the real contemporary one where notions of heroism and heroic actions are relative. Inside a world menaced all the time by greater evils that go beyond human control, heroes are rare if not absent. This is well explained in the above quote as the artist disregards Dr. Eleven to be a leader and a hero for her work and decides to focus instead on the life of people who were desperate for light and hope. These people are very much alike to the symphony members who keep traveling and searching for hope and a future ahead. With the coming of the realistic tradition, writers shift their focus in characterization and decreased interest in recording the deeds of heroes. Instead, writers began to focus on a central character who is a representative of the large population which means a character whom the reader can affiliate to but with no "exceptional brilliancy or attraction" (Boyesen, 1889, p. 598) which explains the new orientation of Miranda to her character Dr. Eleven.

Discussing the aesthetic perception, Comfort discusses another category that pertains to the artistic receptors like readers who "are ... most moved by art" (Comfort, 2008, p. 04). These people appreciate artistic creation highly and enjoy it. Kirsten is a good example of the artistic receptor because she saves Miranda's unpublished copy for so many years all along her travels and trials. The series of Miranda are all the time running through Kirsten's imagination while she is pondering how beautiful they are. During her travels, Kirsten is all the time searching for any other copies in deserted houses among entertainment magazines. Kirsten is proud to possess this piece of art and she wants to keep it safe and unharmed. Her intentions to save it explains the decision of submitting a copy to Clark in order to preserve it in his museum. As such, Kirsten represents the type of artistic receptor who appreciates, tastes, and enjoys the beauty of

artistic work immensely.

### **3.4 Artistic Transformations:**

The novel presents the artistic story of not only Miranda and the symphony but also other characters including Clark who transforms an airport into what he calls a museum of civilization where he preserves items and different objects that belong to the old pre-pandemic world. These possessions are a reminder of the existence of another world and the duty of Clark becomes like a historian who preserves the memory of people. The museum of civilization was like a home for so many people who come close to one another sharing stories and responsibilities while living together. The airport hosted many homeless people including Charlie and Jeremy who were running away from the prophet. It was the station where all the lost members of the symphony would meet lastly. The museum is the bridge between the old world and the new one and also a place that symbolizes the promise of a future. This future shines when Clark accompanies Kirsten to watch through a telescope and what she had seen was a miracle the moment she glimpses a lighted city. Light promises a new beginning and probably the return of civilization once more.

There are also other characters/artists who help constitute the hope for the future and the coming back of civilization like François Diallo. In the pre-pandemic world, he was a librarian, now; he works on a project of documenting “an oral history of this time we live in” (Mandel, 2014, p. 97). He is interested in listening to the stories of everybody while delivering publications to traders in order to distribute them on the road. As such, the type of oral literature he conjures steps out when civilization fell. Diallo makes interviews with people including Kirsten to whom he confesses his intention to write oral history as well as archives of the collapse to publish it. The dialogues he works on are a historical document essentially, as they contain stories and memories of the interviewees. Kirsten for instance narrates about the travels of the symphony throughout different towns and records the changes that occurred to the world.

François’s work becomes like a source of historical knowledge and other moments a source of entertainment in a time when the internet was absent and no means of diffusing knowledge or entertaining people were available. Upon receiving a copy of François’s newspapers through a trader, Clark – the museum owner – reads the interview with Kirsten about the night of Arthur’s death. The

moment Clark was reading, he was amazed and speechless because, through this newspaper, Clark meets his past and remembers that he was among the audience the night of Arthur's death twenty years ago. He realizes that the world becomes once more a small village and the possibility of meetings became feasible. Survival becomes possible through art forms that were embraced by musicians, actors, photographers, journalists, and comic books writers as forms of resistance. Accordingly, Mandel displays hybrid forms of art and their endurance regardless of time passage or destructive forces. The symphony's art, Miranda's sketches of Dr. Eleven, Clark's museum, François's newspapers are evidence of the power of art to persist as well as the unifying artistic language. It is a language that people are ready to acclaim while watching performances and listening to music; it is a language that people can affiliate to while watching artifacts of the old world preserved inside Clark's museum or even while turning the pages of François' newspapers. As such, the novel becomes a dialogic space offering several possibilities of survival and hope to transcend a trajectory end of the world. Mandel imbues her story with a variety of means to resist the apocalyptic ending of civilization. These means include methods of survival itself. In the absence of cars, people either walk on feet or use horses, they teach kids, hunt, and use knives for self-defense. Out of need, for instance, Jeevan who has been trained as a paramedic became a doctor and a surgeon who makes use of traditional methods like alcohol and boiling the needles to prevent infection. Jeevan helps treat sick people which was very effective inside a world where medicine and science failed. As such, the novel records some of the ways through which people who survived the pandemic, try to resist the ending of the world; "The sense that the power of the end in narrative is exhausted leads on the one hand to the anxiety that we exist after the catastrophe, after the end, and on the other to the hope that the very openness of a narrative that cannot be claimed by a unifying telos, that resists the pull of imagined or real absolute ends, keeps alive infinite directions and possibilities" (Hefferman, 2008, p. 14). These "possibilities" of survival constitute the fundamental premise of the novel.

In fact, the framed narrative of *Station Eleven* tells about a multilayered story within a story. It is the narrative of the symphony and arts persistence within the narrative of the flu pandemic and the end of the world within

Miranda's novel of Dr. Eleven and her foretelling of the world ending. As such, the novel offers a cyclic historical vision as explained by Yeats whereby historical events tend to repeat themselves. The world begins with the Fall; a traumatic event that caused men's descend from heaven as explained in the New Testament. Simultaneously, the world ends with some fatal apocalyptic end as Yeats predicted in his theory of history and the cyclic movement of historical events. Mandel's novel, however, looks beyond this ending and promises a new beginning instead.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

*Station Eleven* is a brilliant example of a narrative geared towards cherishing different forms of survival and existence. The pandemic flu and the near extension of the human race that took place in *Station Eleven* were mere tests for man's ability to resist trajectories, survive, adapt, and move forward for a different future. The novel adheres to the language of unity and joy. Through fusing different art forms including music, acting, museum, documentation, and sketches, past and future collide and boundaries melt away. This is the moment when different arts succeed in resisting the ending of the world and promise continuation after the disruption. Thus, Mandel skilfully stresses the interdisciplinary aspect of the novel via joining the world of fiction with the world of art to become one entity.



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